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SCIENCE

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1903.

THE ATOMIC THEORY.*

CONTENTS:	
<i>The Atomic Theory</i> : PROFESSOR F. W. CLARKE	513
Scientific Books:—	
<i>Theobald's Report on Economic Zoology of the British Museum of Natural History</i> : PROFESSOR F. M. WEBSTER	529
<i>Scientific Journals and Articles</i>	530
Societies and Academies:—	
<i>The Onondaga Academy of Sciences</i> : T. C. HOPKINS	530
Discussion and Correspondence:—	
<i>The Animal Parasite supposed to be the Cause of Yellow Fever</i> : DR. J. C. SMITH.	
<i>Some Recent Applications of the A. O. U. Code</i> : DR. ARTHUR ERWIN BROWN.	
<i>A Hitherto Undescribed Visual Phenomenon</i> : DR. GEO. M. GOULD.....	530
Shorter Articles:—	
<i>A Bacterial Spot—A New Disease of Carnations</i> : DR. A. F. WOODS.	
<i>The Frontier of Physiography</i> : PROFESSOR WILLIAM HERBERT HOBBS.....	537
Botanical Notes:—	
<i>A New Edition of Detmer's Praktikum</i> : <i>The Algae of Northwestern America</i> : PROFESSOR CHARLES E. BESSEY.....	540
<i>Studies of the Food Value of Fruit at the University of California</i>	540
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	541
<i>University and Educational News</i>	543

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ONE hundred years ago, on October 21, 1803, John Dalton gave this society the first announcement of his famous atomic theory. It was only a slight preliminary notice, a mere note appended to a memoir upon another subject, and it attracted little or no attention. In 1804 Dalton communicated his discovery to Dr. Thomas Thomson, who at once adopted it in his lectures, and in 1807 gave it still wider publicity in a textbook. A year later Dalton published his 'New System of Chemical Philosophy,' and since then the history of chemistry has been the history of the atomic theory. To celebrate Dalton's achievement, to trace its influence upon chemical doctrine and discovery, is the purpose of my lecture. It is an old story, and yet a new one; for every year adds something to it, and the process of development shows no signs of nearing an end. A theory that grows, and is continually fruitful, can not be easily supplanted. Despite attacks and criticisms, Dalton's generalization still holds the field; and from it, as from a parent stem, spring nearly all the other accepted theories of chemistry.

Every thought has its ancestry. Let us briefly trace the genealogy of the atomic theory. In the very beginnings of phi-

* The Wilde lecture before the Manchester Philosophical Society, delivered May 19, 1903.